NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

New liturgy makes us more and less than human

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Feb. 24, 2011 Bulletins from the Human Side

Denver Auxiliary Bishop James D. Conley seems as pleased with himself as the boy chosen to be class monitor in his recent explanation of the liturgical changes [1] that come into effect in Advent of this year.

?Let me say this,? he confesses, ?I?m very excited about the changes that are coming and the opportunities we have for liturgical renewal.?

He dismisses the liturgical reforms of Vatican II as occasions for ?a lot of silliness and confusion? and while claiming that he doesn?t want to "revisit the errors of the past," he segues into a story of a priest who, at Dorothy Day?s Catholic Worker House, ?used a coffee cup as a chalice.?

Horrors, he says, suggesting that this was an effect of Vatican II.

Let?s stipulate that using a coffee cup for a chalice is hardly sensible but let us also acknowledge that such tales are numberless, hard to verify, and more of the genre of urban legends than of factual reporting.

And we might wonder if the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper resembled the household implements of its time far more than the jewel encrusted chalices raised swiftly aloft by monsignors known for their twenty minute Masses during the Golden Age of respectful liturgy that Bishop Conley and others look dreamily back to as the golden age of going to Mass before Vatican II.

Let us also stipulate that Bishop Conley is a good and holy prelate. That does not keep us from examining his statement that ?In the Mass, God stoops down to lift us up to His level. He makes it possible for us...to sing and worship with the angels.?

He may be enamored of the idea of an angel because it is defined as ?one of nine orders of celestial beings listed in order of rank from highest to lowest.? Does the bishop have a conflict of interest in being so partial to something that describes the hierarchy of the bishops themselves?

The good bishop seems to forget that the celebration of the Liturgy is a human transaction in which we invest our whole undivided personalities, much as we might in singing the Alleluia Chorus, in worshiping God.

We destroy the essence of this experience by suggesting that we strive to be angels rather than ourselves in the profoundly human act of praying at Mass. Praying with the angels sounds more dignified but fits along as just an inappropriate fiction as sleeping with the fishes.

If, as Conley asserts, post-Vatican II liturgical renewal has got ?this dynamic [singing and worshiping with the angels] exactly backward,? then he has got it upside down. Indeed, he is much taken with up and down, as if heaven is up and the earth is down, or that the earth and the universe are somehow divided from each other.

Conley is living in the days before Copernicus and Galileo rather than in the Space Age in which it is clear that

the earth is not separate from the heavens but is in the heavens. Nor can we, from what we now understand of space, speak of an up or a down.

We must re-imagine our liturgical language if we are going to worship as humans dwelling in space. That possibility seems beyond his powers as he insists on using concrete notions that kill any sense of the transcendence or immanence of which he makes a great deal.

He may not know that the meanings of *transcendence* include (from the root *skand*) ?to climb over? and that it is related to *ascend*, as every bishop knows, and condescend, that bishops like Conley are very good at.

Does he know that one of the meanings of immanent is ?restricted entirely to the mind?? That is where he conducts his discussion of what he considers the infinite superiority of how we respond to ?The Lord be with you.?

It is much better, he says, to say ?And with your spirit too? -- apparently not realizing that he is thereby subdividing human personality by addressing ?spirit? as if it were, as one definition puts it, ?the activating principle, the will.?

We do not speak to each other?s spirit, but to each other as unified persons -- not as strange concoctions of body and soul or antagonistic elements of spirit and flesh.

But if he doesn?t acknowledge the human person, neither does he like the ?People? of God, finding the phrase too ?pedestrian.?

He might prefer a conquering army but, in fact, a People is defined in the dictionary as ?a body of persons sharing a common religion, culture, language, and inherited condition of life.?

Too pedestrian? Come, Bishop, you say that words are important but they only take us so far. By that you criticize Vatican II. But you use words you apparently do not understand, and that gets us nowhere.

The French have a saying that ?whoever tried to be an angel ends up being a beast.?

The bishop might well ponder that in light of the Church?s sex abuse scandals and return to a sense of the human person as the subject of the liturgy.

The bishop longs for incense rising to the heavens but his talk is closer to nonsense falling like acid rain on the earth.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/01/2015 - 13:39*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/bulletins-human-side/new-liturgy-makes-us-more-and-less-human

Editor's Note: We can send you an e-mail alert every time Kennedy's column, Bulletins from the Human Side," is posted to NCRonline.org. Go to this page and follow directions: **E-mail alert sign-up** [2]. If you already receive e-mail alerts from us, click on the "update my profile" button to add Kennedy to your list.

Links:
[1] http://www.archden.org/index.cfm/ID/4951
[2] http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup